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LETTER DATED 6 JANUARY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LEBANON TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to inform you that the Government of Lebanon hereby requests the Security Council to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which expires on 31 January 1998, for a further interim period of six months, on the basis of the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) of 19 March 1978 and all other relevant resolutions and decisions of the Security Council.

In view of Israel's continued aggression against Lebanon and the serious setbacks suffered by the peace process, it must be emphasized that the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) remains the only way to stop the violence in southern Lebanon, enabling the Government of Lebanon to extend its sovereign authority throughout the area under occupation to the internationally recognized boundaries and re-establish law and order throughout the region.

In this context, UNIFIL represents the international community's commitment to the restoration of Lebanon's full sovereignty and territorial integrity. The role of UNIFIL is to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore international peace and security and assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.

The Monitoring Group, which emanated from the April 1996 understanding, in the wake of the Israeli aggression of April 1996, has helped in reducing the intensity of the shelling directed against civilians in southern Lebanon and western Bekaa. However, the objective of this Group is necessarily of a temporary and limited nature and is in no way an alternative to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which called upon Israel immediately to cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory.

The Lebanese civilian population living under Israeli occupation is undergoing daily hardships. In this context, I refer in particular to Israel's continued refusal to release hundreds of innocent Lebanese detainees held for

years in Israeli jails and the notorious detention camps in Al-Khiam and Marjayoun, in southern Lebanon, manned by the Israeli-controlled militia in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Many of the detainees are suffering from serious diseases as a result of harsh living conditions, subjection to ill-treatment and denial of medical care. Others have died in the camps or shortly after being released. The detainees have been subjected to physical and mental torture in further violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I take this opportunity to confirm Lebanon's commitment to the Middle East peace process in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973, and, as far as Lebanon is concerned, 425 (1978).

Lebanon's comprehensive national recovery remains hampered by Israel's continued occupation of southern Lebanon, its daily aggression against its territory and citizens and the persistent blunt calls by high Israeli officials to deliberately bombard and destroy basic infrastructural installations, including power-generating stations. Nevertheless, I am pleased to report that the national reconstruction and rehabilitation process is moving ahead.

The Government of Lebanon avails itself of this opportunity to pay tribute to the UNIFIL command, administrators, troops and troop-contributing countries for their noble efforts and sacrifices made in the cause of peace. It is moreover pleased to report that the command of UNIFIL and the Lebanese authorities continue to coordinate their efforts towards the goal of deploying the Lebanese army throughout the southern part of the country to its internationally recognized boundaries. In this regard, the Government of Lebanon considers that the operational strength and capacity of UNIFIL should be maintained.

Furthermore, the Government of Lebanon wishes to express to you and your assistants its deep appreciation for your tireless efforts, which contribute to the valuable presence of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon.

I would be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Samir MOUBARAK
Ambassador
Permanent Representative